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SUBJECT: CAMBODIA ELECTIONS: CAMPAIGN SEASON SNAPSHOT FROM PARTS OF TWO PROVINCES

REF: A. PHNOM PENH 558

[B.](#) PHNOM PENH 554

[¶](#)11. (SBU) Summary: Emboffs recently conducted pre-election monitoring trips in mainly rural parts of two populous provinces during the official campaign season for Cambodia's July 27 National Assembly elections, noting intense Cambodian People's Party campaigning throughout the areas traveled. Out of six Commune Election Committees (CEC) with whom Emboffs met, all six reported they had not received a single formal election campaign complaint. During a meeting with Sam Rainsy Party (SRP) members in a rural district of Prey Veng province, a local SRP leader stated that the district party office has received election-related grievances but has not submitted complaints to CECs. The Prey Veng Provincial Election Committee (PEC) chief stated that few complaints have been submitted to CECs or to his PEC because he has been encouraging party leaders to reach mutual understanding among themselves to avoid election-related conflicts. Though complaints do arise, the atmosphere in Prey Veng to date is reflective of most of Cambodia this election campaign - peaceful (except for the rare and short-lived megaphone contest between rival parties) and with considerably fewer serious incidents of threats, intimidation or violence than in 2003. A July 14 candidate debate including four of the major parties confirms post's assessment that the major issues in the campaign are corruption, inflation, job creation, and more economic development to bring Cambodians out of poverty. Illegal immigration is a hot-button issue. End Summary.

[¶](#)12. (SBU) Roughly halfway into the month-long official campaign period for Cambodia's July 27 National Assembly elections, Emboffs observed seemingly well-coordinated and funded CPP campaign efforts during recently conducted monitoring visits to two nearby provinces, Kampong Cham and Prey Veng. Kampong Cham province is represented by 18 parliamentary seats, more than any other province in Cambodia, and Prey Veng by 11, the third-highest number of seats for one province. In 2003, the CPP won eight of the seats in Kampong Cham, FUNCINPEC five, and SRP five. In Prey Veng, the CPP won six seats, FUNCINPEC three, and SRP two. Emboffs met with CEC and village members in communes where the SRP had won positions during the 2007 commune council elections or where local human rights NGO Adhoc stated they had received reports of election or political party-related complaints.

CPP's Campaigning Ubiquitous in Some Areas

[¶](#)13. (SBU) On some rural roads in both Kampong Cham and Prey Veng, Emboffs passed through some villages where CPP blue flag campaign stickers or signs were posted on nearly every

house and kiosk, and in a few villages the blue flags were tacked to nearly every tree along some dirt roads. In the Soutip commune of Kampong Cham province, small CPP flags hung on many trees, fences and houses, each wrapped in a plastic cover sheet. The Soutip CEC reported 8,504 voters in the commune. During the 2007 commune council elections the SRP won five out of nine commune council seats including the chief, first deputy and second deputy council positions; the CPP won four. Emboffs noticed some, but fewer, FUNCINPEC, Norodom Ranariddh Party (NRP), and SRP signs in Soutip. Some trees and fences were decorated with SRP signs in a similar fashion as those with CPP signs.

¶4. (SBU) While driving through some villages, Emboffs noted a few houses with large CPP campaign posters, strings of blue CPP flags across the yard, and the blaring of campaign messages from loudspeakers. These appeared to be local campaign headquarters, or the houses of prominent CPP members or supporters. Emboffs observed no houses adorned in this manner with propaganda of political parties other than the CPP in the parts of the few villages visited during these trips; however, during a later trip through towns in Kampot province, houses were similarly decked out with FUNCINPEC, NRP, and SRP flags and signs.

"Eyes Closed" to SUVs Campaigning Without License Plates

¶5. (SBU) On National Highways 1 from Phnom Penh to Prey Veng, and routes 6 and 7 from Phnom Penh to Kampong Cham, Emboffs spotted tens of late-model SUVs with large CPP emblems pasted to side and rear windows. Approximately half

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of such vehicles had license plates removed. Also spotted were vehicles sporting SRP and Human Rights Party (HRP) propaganda, though far fewer than those of the CPP. Emboffs did not observe SRP or HRP vehicles with license plates removed, but did see one vehicle with a green Royal Government of Cambodia license plate that was decorated with large SRP campaign stickers. (Note: A July 11 Cambodia Daiy article quoted a recent letter from SRP Parliamentarian Son Chhay to Deputy Prime Minister Sar Kheng stating, "There are some civil servants, police officers and military officers who removed (license plates) from state vehicles in order to (conduct campaigning).". In the same article, MOI spokesperson Khieu Sopheak was reported to have stated that officials who had spent their own money on vehicles may do as they wish with the vehicle, but that they should remove state or military license plates. Regarding whether driving a vehicle without license plates violated Cambodia's traffic laws, Khieu Sopheak reportedly stated that it is up to the traffic police to enforce the law. In the same article, Phnom Penh Municipal Traffic Police Chief Tin Prasoer was quoted: "We cannot stop (vehicles with plates removed) during the campaign rally; otherwise they will be disappointed. If we can forgive them, we close our eyes." End note.)

Other Parties' Signage on Roads Not Homes

¶6. (SBU) Emboffs saw party signs for each of the 11 parties running in the national elections while driving to and through Kampong Cham and Prey Veng along national highways and some village roads. However, it was observed that few homes had SRP or HRP signs affixed directly to them; and not one house was spotted that had a Norodom Ranariddh Party (NRP), FUNCINPEC, or smaller, lesser-known party sign pasted on it. In parts of Smaong Cheung commune of Prey Veng province that Emboffs visited, many houses were observed with CPP stickers pasted on them, fewer houses with no party stickers, and no houses with a non-CPP party sticker affixed directly to them. One kiosk owner with a large HRP sign posted in front of her house and kiosk close to the road stated the sign was not in her yard and that the party had asked her for permission before erecting the sign. The kiosk

and adjoining house had no other party sign affixed. At a different kiosk that had no signs posted, the shopkeeper stated that CPP members had come to her family house asking her to post a CPP sign but she declined. She said she was momentarily afraid when she told the CPP members "no" but they did not bother her or force her to put up the sign.

¶17. Smaong Cheung commune in Prey Veng province has 10,752 registered voters across its 17 villages. Adhoc recommended Emboffs conduct pre-election monitoring in the village because the NGO had received reports that Smaong Cheung village chiefs had been neglecting to hand out Voter Information Notice (VIN) cards to SRP members. During interviews with about 15 village members, all but one reported that they had received their VIN cards; the CEC stated they had not received any complaints. In the 2007 commune council elections, the CPP won nine out of eleven seats in Smaong Cheung, the SRP won the first deputy chief seat, and the NRP won the second deputy chief seat.

Villager's House Doubles As Polling Station

¶18. (SBU) Twenty-two out of 26 total planned polling stations in Smaong Cheung commune will be located at the homes of local residents. Emboffs visited one of the future polling stations, a typical Cambodian-style wooden house on stilts located off a dirt footpath several houses back from the dusty main village road. The polling area will be set up underneath the house, a space that is currently occupied by rows of chopped wood, a raised wooden platform, and other household items. The resident stated that her home had been chosen as a polling station for previous elections and was selected because of its central location.

SRP Afraid Its Party Agents Will Be Bought?

¶19. (SBU) The six CECs we met with reported that their local SRP leaders had not yet submitted the name of the party's local party agents but that other parties represented in their communes had already submitted party agent names. (Note: Party agents are defined as partisan observers who primarily represent and protect the interests of their party.

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They help identify and expose mistakes and rigging at the polling stations on election day. End Note.) In the Soutip commune of Kampong Cham province, where the SRP won the chief, first and second deputy chief, and two other seats in the 2007 commune council election, the CEC chief stated that the SRP had not yet submitted party agent names in their commune because the SRP had less than 1,000 members there. He stated that three SRP commune council members and many others in the commune have left the SRP and joined the CPP.

¶10. (SBU) In Preah Sdach district of Prey Veng province, the district SRP committee chief stated that the party was hiding the identity of SRP party agents until closer to the elections because he fears local village and commune chiefs would convince the party agents "not to do their duties well." During the same meeting, one SRP member who planned to act as a party agent stated that he was not worried for his personal security as a party agent.

SRP Complaining But Not to CEC

¶11. (SBU) Within five communes where Adhoc told Emboffs they had received reports of non-specific "discrimination" against non-CPP members, removal of non-CPP party signs, and places where village and commune chiefs had "taught" residents to vote for the CPP, and a sixth commune where the SRP had won a majority of commune seats, the local CECs reported that they had not received formal complaints from residents or parties. During a meeting with Preah Sdach district SRP members, one

man stated that he resolved a recent politically related problem on his own instead of filing a complaint with the CEC because the persons involved were his relatives. He said the relatives were authorities in his village and they told him that if he did not leave the SRP, they would try to inhibit him from obtaining administrative documents when he needed them. A different SRP member at the meeting stated that he had been receiving anonymous phone calls from a person promising him money to leave the SRP. He said that he did not file a complaint for two reasons: first, he did not know the identity of the caller; second, he reported the calls to Prey Veng SRP Parliamentarian Chea Poch who told him to ignore the calls.

¶12. (SBU) The Preah Sdach district SRP chief stated that party members and other villagers are afraid to submit complaints against CPP members because written complaints to the CEC require detailed information regarding where and when the incident happened, and the identities of the alleged victim and alleged perpetrator. He stated that those with grievances are afraid of exposing their identities through such complaints. He did not elaborate on the nature of the grievances. However, the meeting took place together with approximately 30 SRP members from the district, and none came forward stating that they themselves were afraid to submit a complaint.

Teachers Demonstrate How To Vote CPP

¶13. (SBU) SRP members in Preah Sdach district reported that Lvea commune high school students, some of whom were of voting age, had come home with National Assembly election ballot "worksheets" replicating actual ballots except that only the CPP was represented in name and logo on the worksheet. The students reported that their Ta Kork village high school teachers had used the worksheets to teach them how to vote. One of the SRP members told Emboffs that when he went to file a complaint about the incident to the local CEC, the CEC told him that they did not have any of the "1202" official complaint forms. He then planned to file his complaint when he attended one of the CEC's regular meetings of political party representatives but when he went to the most recently scheduled meeting, no one showed up but him. The district SRP office did not have any complaint forms either -- the district SRP chief told Emboffs that community members have to obtain the 1202 forms from the CEC. (Note: He apparently had received no complaint forms from the SRP party apparatus. End Note.)

Prey Veng PEC Promotes Mutual Understanding

¶14. (SBU) During a meeting with Prey Veng PEC members, the PEC chief stated that he held weekly meetings with representatives of the nine political parties running for

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seats in the province, and that he told the parties to promote mutual understanding among themselves to avoid election-related conflicts. He stated that Prey Veng residents know how to submit complaints to their CECs or PEC because he had instructed party reps to distribute election-related information to their members, information that included how to submit complaints. The PEC added that if villagers have complaints, they should submit them to the party to which they belong. (Note: The PEC chief told Emboffs that if international observers see violations of election law or procedure on election day, they should report it directly to the NEC, not to the PEC. According to the Cambodian Code of Conduct for Electoral Observers, observers may report any apparent violation to the Election Committee structure at any of its three levels. End note.)

Prey Veng PEC's One Complaint Resolved

¶15. (SBU) The Prey Veng PEC reported it has thus far received one complaint from Roung Domrei commune where the SRP alleged that MOI Secretary of State Prum Sokha handed out gifts such as rice and sarongs to voters. The PEC dismissed the complaint stating the PEC found that Prum Sokha had distributed CPP logo t-shirts and hats that are not deemed "gifts" as handouts of money, rice or sarongs are considered.

Prum Sokha was reported to have handed out items during a groundbreaking ceremony of a Japanese government funded school. The PEC told Emboff that Prum Sokha had also distributed notebooks and pencils to students of the school.

NDI-Debate in Prey Veng: Cambodians' Concerns Televised Nationwide

¶16. (U) In a candidate debate held in Prey Veng's Kampong Trabaek district July 14, the candidates and citizens posed unrehearsed questions which are indicative of the issues being raised in this campaign. The major opposition parties (SRP and HRP in this debate) raised corruption, citing a recent study that USD 300-500 million is lost every year to the government's coffers due to corruption. The high cost of food, fertilizer, and gasoline were also highlighted in the debate as were programs to create more jobs or build on the country's recent economic development. One citizen asked the candidates if they would pass the current draft Anti-Corruption Law and, if they could not, what were their plans for stepping down. Enforcement of Cambodia's immigration laws was a big topic among the debating candidates. SRP candidate and current MP Chea Poch highlighted the existence of over 1,400 Vietnamese families in a nearby river town. (Note: To date, the rhetoric has been strong on immigration but has not turned ugly. End Note.)

Comment

¶17. (SBU) During the first two weeks of the official campaign season, in parts of Kampong Cham and Prey Veng, the CPP looked to be spending more of its campaign money on highly visible party advertisements -- giving the appearance of other parties being left in the dust in these pockets of the electorate. However, it is still early, and with less money to spend within the non-dominant parties, they may be making decisions to wait out a spending spree on party stickers and flags until the right moment closer to the elections. One district SRP leader stated that their current strategy is not the sticker-on-every-tree approach, but rather to hand out leaflets, fliers, and small party information cards in a more subtle effort. As Post's pre-monitoring trips continue around the country, including completed trips to parts of Phnom Penh, Takeo, Kampot, and other parts of Prey Veng, Emboffs have noted strong SRP, FUNCINPEC, and NRP showings in regards to visible campaign propaganda.

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